

What a difference a year makes at WVDP

By LAURA MAGEE
Journal Editor

The West Valley Demonstration Project has a poster that says, "What a Difference a Year Makes." It is filled with markings of where infrastructure has been reduced or demolished and larger points of where various materials have been processed, decontaminated or shipped to disposal in the past year.

"It aligns beautifully with the vision that we have for the site," said Al Konetzni, president of West Valley Nuclear Services Company and West Valley Environmental

Services, adding his vision is to at least reach the point where the only remaining items at the site are two disposal areas and four dried tanks.

While proud of WVDP's progress this year, there are several accomplishments that the various organizations, including WVNSCO, the United States Department of Energy and New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, have achieved that Konetzni is particularly happy about.

First, the Enhanced Interim End State, or as some call it "The Way Forward," is gaining traction as the project's vision for the future among the various stakeholders,

Konetzni said. It is an interim step for final decommissioning of the site consistent with the West Valley Demonstration Act (Public Law 96-368). The various organizations will proceed toward this state by performing waste disposition, decontamination, deactivation, and disposition of facilities, and infrastructure/landlord activities. Second on Konetzni's list of accomplishments is that 12,000 drums of low level waste, more than 60 percent, were removed from the drum cell and have been shipped out-of-state to the Nevada Test Site for final disposal.

(Continued on Page 7)

WVDP cleanup progress in full swing...

(Continued from Page 1)

With all the progress, Konetzni credits everything to a great work force, including unionized workers and management that "is almost eye-watering."

Saying he was "pleased as a peach," Konetzni added he is almost in disbelief that the work force could get so much work done in a year, noting it is the best group he has ever worked with, which means a lot since Konetzni worked in the naval service for many years.

While he didn't know if this has been West Valley Demonstration Project's most successful year, he said the past six months were significantly more productive than the six months prior to that.

"We stretched ourselves," Konetzni said, regarding the shipping, processing and decontamination of hazardous materials, adding the site has met all its goals for the time frame.

The poster also points out that 28 boxes of waste have been processed in the remote handled waste facility; the valve aisle, the fuel receiving and shipping water treatment area, and the analytical labs have been decontaminated; and 241,500 cubic feet of low level waste have been shipped to disposal.

Looking ahead the next couple of months, Konetzni said all the drums will be shipped out-of-state by the end of September; the old processing building will be prepped for decontamination and



ROLLING AWAY — An Erie County Sheriff watches a railroad crossing as a train transports drums of low level waste from the West Valley Demonstration Project. Its destination is the Nevada Test Site for final disposal. *Photo courtesy of Terry Dunford.*

demolition; they will continue shipping the remaining waste, which is mostly legacy waste; and the deconstruction of buildings will continue.

Also, the demonstration project's new contractor, West Valley Environmental Services Company, will be making the transition to conducting the next phase of cleanup, Konetzni said. WVES is a team led by the project's incumbent operator, Washington Group International, for which Konetzni also works. The contract starts on September 30, so Konetzni said his organization will be making sure WVES is set up with due diligence. He added that he doesn't believe there will be any major growth or decrease in personnel at the site but that still needs to be decided upon.

Konetzni added the House and Senate have been very supportive to the federally funded project. U.S. Senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton, along with their staffers, have shown "terrific interest in West Valley."

To date, the project has solidi-

fied over 600,000 gallons of high-level waste into 275 canisters and shipped over 800,000 cubic feet of low-level waste in accordance with the West Valley Demonstration Act of 1980, according to a DOE press release.

The West Valley Demonstration Project has been operated by Washington Group International subsidiary West Valley Nuclear Services Company for the DOE since the project's inception in 1982. The WVDP is a DOE managed, contractor-operated, environmental remediation project located on the site of the Western New York Nuclear Services Center, owned by the state of New York and administered by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. Located on approximately 200 acres, the WVDP occupies the site of the only commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing facility to have operated in the United States.

Note: The Journal will continue to print periodic updates of the progress being conducted at West Valley Demonstration Project.

THE BUFFALO NEWS

WEST VALLEY

Nuclear Services Co. offering buyouts

Updated: 07/27/07 7:08 AM

WEST VALLEY — The contractor at the West Valley Demonstration Project announced Thursday it was offering employees buyouts.

West Valley Nuclear Services Co., which will soon give way to a new contractor, said employees who accepted the opportunity would be given severance pay based on years of service, extended health care coverage and retraining support.

The company's announcement did not say how many employees the company was looking to shed but said that layoffs might follow. Employees have 15 days to accept the offer.

As of Sept. 1, a new contractor, West Valley Environmental Services, will be in charge at the project.

Find this article at:

<http://www.buffalonews.com/cityregion/otherwny/story/128183.html>

OLEAN TIMES HERALD

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West Valley employees offered buyouts

WEST VALLEY - West Valley Nuclear Services Co. this week offered its employees the opportunity to voluntarily leave the company and receive full separation benefits.

This offer coincides with the transition of the West Valley Demonstration Project management and operations contract from West Valley Nuclear Services to West Valley Environmental Services, LLC.

"As the nature of the cleanup work has changed, it has become necessary to adjust the workforce accordingly," said Al Konetzni, president of both Nuclear Services and the new contractor, West Valley Environmental, said in a press release.

The release did not state how many jobs remain as part of the project nor did it address how many workers were eligible for the buyouts.

Employees who choose the buyout will receive separation benefits, including severance pay based on years of service, extended health care coverage, and retraining support.

Employees have 15 days to apply for the program.

Once the voluntary separation program has concluded, Nuclear Services will evaluate staffing levels in various skill and expertise areas to determine if layoffs are necessary to meet project needs.

West Valley Nuclear has managed and operated the project since 1981. In the 1980s and 1990s its employees designed, constructed and operated a number of remote radioactive waste processing facilities. In 2002, the processing of 600,000 gallons of highly radioactive liquid waste into solid glass was completed.

Since then, the project has gone through a series of work force adjustments in response to work scope changes.

The U.S. Department of Energy environmental cleanup project is conducted in cooperation with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

West Valley Nuclear will manage the site through Aug. 31; West Valley Environmental will assume management of the project effective Sept. 1.

The West Valley Environmental team is comprised of Washington Group International, Jacobs Engineering, Environmental Chemical Corp. and Parallax.

MONITOR

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MONITOR

Waste Management ♦ Clean Up

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AT WEST VALLEY CONTRACTOR BEGINS WORKFORCE RESTRUCTURING

West Valley Nuclear Services Company last week launched a workforce restructuring effort targeting the company's approximately 300 employees. The effort entails a voluntary separations program, under which WVNSCO employees who choose to leave the company will receive severance pay based on years of service, extended healthcare coverage and retraining support. Once the voluntary separation program has concluded, WVNSCO plans to "evaluate staffing levels in various skill and expertise areas to determine if involuntary staff reductions are necessary," according to a company press release.

WVNSCO spokeswoman Sonja Allen said the company did not have a set goal for the number of employees who chose to participate in the voluntary separations program, adding that the voluntary separation program was being carried out both because of an anticipated reduced workscope and employees expressing a desire to move on to other employment. "We're not targeting any particular number," she said.

The workforce restructuring at West Valley comes as the site prepares for a new cleanup contractor. In late June, the Department of Energy awarded the site's interim completion contract to West Valley Environmental Services, which consists of site incumbent Washington Group, Jacobs Engineering, Environmental Chemical Corporation (ECC) and EnergySolutions through its purchase earlier this year of Parallax. The new contractor is set to take over beginning Sept. 1. "As the nature of the cleanup work has changed, it has become necessary to adjust the workforce accordingly," said Al Konetzni, president of both WVNSCO and WVES, in last week's release. "We are honored that DOE selected WVES to operate and manage the WVDP. Offering this program positions our workforce to charge ahead to fulfill DOE's vision of an interim end state." ■

Note: Dan Sullivan/DOE-West Valley is on the agenda to speak at:

THE FIRST ANNUAL RADWASTE SUMMIT

Thursday, September 6

3:55 LLRW Waste Transport to Nevada Test Site—New Challenges to be Faced by DOE Sites

Dan Sullivan, Federal Project Director

DOE-West Valley

WV Demonstration Project seeks work force reductions

By LAURA MAGEE
Journal Editor

As the nature of cleanup work changes and in a move that he deemed good for everyone, Al Konetzni, with the approval of the government, decided to offer the West Valley Demonstration Project's workforce the opportunity to voluntarily leave the company and receive full separation benefits.

Konetzni is president of both the incumbent West Valley Nuclear Services Company and the project's new contractor, West Valley Environmental Services, LLC. The offer coincides with the transition of the WVDP's management and operations contract from WVNSCO to WVES.

Konetzni said Tuesday he'd like to see the program limited to less than 50 people.

Employees who choose the self-select program will receive separation benefits, including severance pay based on years of service, extended health care coverage and retraining support. Employees have 15 days, ending August 14, to apply for the program.

The reason for the voluntary work force reductions is twofold. First, it positions the WVDP workforce to make continued cleanup progress toward completing the Department of Energy's goal of reaching an interim end state with no slowdown in cleanup progress. Second, it affords employees who have expressed an interest in moving on to other employment the opportunity to do so. This makes people feel good, Konetzni said, because of the cash value they would not have otherwise received if they just quit.

The move is also in preparation for an unknown future, he added, because the company is still unsure of the government's 2008 funding for the project.

"I'm trying my 'darnedest' for us, the state, county and workers, in particular, to be as flexible as I can without putting us in a position of breaking us," Konetzni said.

To be honest, he admitted, the move also limits his involve-

ment in the restructuring with some employees making their own choices on whether to leave or stay. That's what he likes about the program - it gives the workforce a personal choice.

When asked how many employees have expressed an interest in leaving, Konetzni said he didn't know yet but he believes the final number will run the "gamut" between zero and 50. He added that he thinks employees enjoy the company's openness and honesty, although since they do know restructuring is occurring it makes some employees nervous.

Once the voluntary separation program has concluded, WVNSCO will evaluate staffing levels in various skill and expertise areas to determine if involuntary staff reductions are necessary to meet the project needs. These employees, Konetzni noted, will receive similar benefit packages. Matching employee skill sets to the tasks ahead is needed in order to ensure that key WVDP objectives are met, according to a WVNSCO press release.

After August 31, when the new company takes over and there is a better picture of government funding, Konetzni said the workforce levels might increase because of a bigger workload or to speed the project up.

The last day at the project for employees who choose to take the self-select program and people let go for restructuring will be August 30 or 31, depending on whether the employee regularly works Fridays.

The WVDP is a U.S. Department of Energy environmental cleanup and waste management project. The project is conducted in cooperation with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. WVNSCO will manage and operate the WVDP through August 31.

WVES will assume management of the WVDP effective September 1. The WVES team is comprised of Washington Group International, Jacobs Engineering, Environmental Chemical Corporation and Parallax. Both WVNSCO and WVES are part of Washington Group International.



Project updates presented at WVDP public meeting

By LAURA MAGEE
Journal Editor

Project updates were presented at the quarterly public meeting for the West Valley Demonstration Project on Tuesday, August 7 at the Ashford Office Complex.

Bryan Bower, director of the state Department of Energy at West Valley, spoke about the many accomplishments, including removing large amounts of waste from the site, that the workforce has completed in the past six months. He added that between January and June of this year, nearly 12,000 drums were removed from storage, packaged in durable bags, loaded on gondola cars and shipped to the Nevada Test Site via rail. In the previous four months, only 1,500 drums were shipped. Bower said the workforce is on target to have the entire drum cell empty by the end of September.

Another accomplishment was the decontamination and dismantlement of the fuel pool pump pit. Bower said this was challenging work with confined space and high radiation levels. He gave credit to the operators and engineers for tackling this project and said it is “basically ready for demolition in the future.”

He also mentioned other tasks that have moved the project ahead. “In short, West Valley Nuclear Services accomplished all their goals,”

Bower said.

Upcoming work includes the continued offsite shipment of drum cell waste with a target of 4,500 removed, processing five waste boxes in the remote handled waste facility, placing a subcontract for the installation of a barrier wall and cap over the Nuclear Regulatory Commission licensed disposal area and conducting further investigation of the North Plateau Groundwater Plume. Bower added that the plume is not a public safety and health risk.

The next quarterly public meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, November 13 at the Ashford Office Complex.



SAFETY TEST - Chet Weaver, left, and Marty Regan, of URS, sample water from wells Monday at the West Valley Demonstration Project site in Ashford. There are 75 wells that URS sample quarterly. Photo courtesy of Terry Dunford.

Radioactive plume at WVDP not a health or safety threat

By LAURA MAGEE
Journal Editor

Understandably, if a resident heard there was a radioactive leak in the area, it would cause confusion, fright and probably some spreading of rumors.

The *Journal* sat down this week with officials from the West Valley Demonstration Project to set the record straight on the spreading radioactive plume of ground water at the WVDP site in Ashford.

The fact is there was a radioactive leak at the West Valley Demonstration Project years ago and it continues to spread. It is also a fact that the leak poses no threat to the safety and health of the public or work force. The United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission confirmed this in an independent review.

In the 2005 annual site environmental report, it was reported that the maximum dose to an offsite individual from the project's north plateau drainage was 0.035 millirem (a rem is an unit of radiation dose), based on public access at the WNYNSC boundary. The international limit is 100 mrem, making the dose at WVDP 1,000 times below the actual limit.

"For people, plants and animals, it is far, far away from any international limit," said Al Konetzni, president of both the incumbent

West Valley Nuclear Services Company and the project's new contractor, West Valley Environmental Services, LLC.

The calculated potential annual exposure to a maximally exposed individual will peak at 0.051 mrem/year in 2029.

The plume originated from process piping leaks from the former reprocessing facility during commercial operations, most likely in 1969, explained WVDP United States Department of Energy Director Bryan Bower. Although the DOE discovered the plume in the early 1990s during routine environmental monitoring, the plume most likely started spreading around 1978 during reprocessing operations, while New York State Energy Research Development Authority held the NRC operating license.

The primary isotope in the plume is Strontium-90, which is water-soluble. Located on the northern plateau of the WVDP site, the plume is approximately 1,200 feet long and 450 feet wide and averages 25 feet deep throughout the length of the plume. It is spreading north-northeast.

"There is movement across the site although we're taking action to slow the movement," Bower said.

Once the plume was identified in

(Continued on Page 2)

No threat from WVDP plume...

(Continued from Page 1)

the early 1990s, DOE increased the ground water monitoring program to monitor and better define the plume. In 1995, DOE installed a pump and treat program to mitigate the migration of contamination. Approximately 43 million gallons of contaminated ground water has been recovered and processed since November 1995, according to paperwork given to the *Journal* by Bower.

The DOE furthermore installed a pilot permeable wall in 1999 to provide passive treatment for the eastern lobe of the plume. It is 30 feet long, 26 feet deep and seven feet wide.

Because Strontium-90 has a half-life of 30 years, it means every 30 years it is half as radioactive as

when it started. Therefore, Bower explained, it is decaying as it moves across the site.

"There's a race going on as it is moving across the site and is decaying," Bower said.

The core team of stakeholders has been looking at what can be done in the future to slow or stop the migration of the plume. One idea, Bower explained, is placing a passive in-ground permeable treatment wall along the leading edge of ground water plume and installing an ion-exchange media layer in the ditch/swale area. This approach, Bower said, is receiving a lot of support from the core team.

Konetzni added it will be "key" to demolish the main processing plant, under which the radiation is leaking, in the future to have access to the source of the plume.

Editorial Section:

Knowledge stops spread of rumors

Our front page news article on the West Valley Demonstration Project's radioactive leak, which caused a contaminated plume of groundwater may have come as a surprise to some readers, even though the leak occurred decades ago. Others may not have known the extent or correct facts regarding the plume.

It seems whenever WVDP is brought up in conversation among area residents, the rumors start flying. That's why the *Journal* decided to print an article about the plume, even though it is old news (albeit with new information on what the DOE is doing to stop or slow the migration of contamination), and why we encourage our readers to attend the project's quarterly public meetings. At these meetings, updates are presented and there is an opportunity for residents to ask questions. The next quarterly public meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, November 13 at the Ashford Office Complex.

SITE CLEANUP

**West Valley Project
contract awarded**

A four-year contract for managing and operating the Department of Energy's West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP) was awarded to West Valley Environmental Services (WVES), the DOE announced on June 29. The contract is valued at about \$159 million for a period that runs from October 1, 2007, through June 30, 2011.

WVES was formed by Washington Group International (WGI), Jacobs Engineering, Parallax, and ECC. The announcement of the contract came on the heels of a three-month contract extension for WGI subsidiary West Valley Nuclear Services

Company (WVNS), which will continue to operate the site until October 1, when WVES takes over the site's management.

The site, in West Valley, N.Y., was home to a spent fuel reprocessing plant that operated from 1966 to 1972. During that time, 660 000 gallons of radioactive liquid waste accumulated in an underground tank. Also, 15 acres of the land was used for the disposal of radioactive waste from commercial waste generators, and another seven acres served as a landfill to dispose of radioactive waste generated by reprocessing.

In 1976, Nuclear Fuel Services, Inc.,—the company that ran the reprocessing plant—decided that the costs and regulatory requirements of reprocessing made the venture impractical. The company left the site after its lease expired in December 1980, transferring ownership and responsibility for the waste and the facility to the state of New York.

In October 1980, Congress enacted the WVDP Act, making the DOE responsible for solidifying the high-level waste, disposing of waste created by the solidification, and decommissioning the facilities used in the process. The land and facilities are not owned by the DOE, but by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). The land represents only 200 acres of the larger Western

New York Service Center, which is approximately 3300 acres, also owned by NYSERDA.

The DOE in 1982 selected WVNS to manage and operate the site. The next year, vitrification—the incorporation of high-level radioactive waste into glass—was selected as the preferred method for solidifying the waste. Vitrification did not begin until after a processing plant was built and began operation in 1996, and it continued until 2001, according to the DOE. The process emptied the waste tank and produced 275 stainless steel canisters, each one standing 10 feet tall, of hardened radioactive glass.

In 1999, a DOE program was started to begin processing unserviceable equipment from the vitrification plant. The DOE said that this program's success helped in the development of a remote-handled waste facility at West Valley to process large-scale, highly contaminated equipment that was removed from the site during decontamination and decommissioning activities.

The DOE said that although much progress has been made at the site, such as solidifying the high-level waste and removing obsolete systems and facilities, there is still work to be done. The DOE is striving to accomplish the majority of this work by 2010. RU

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West Valley cleanup project to reduce staff by about 50 people

By Douglas Turner - NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU

Updated: 08/17/07 6:42 AM

WASHINGTON — About 50 people will be trimmed from the largest federal aid project in Western New York — the West Valley nuclear cleanup program at Ashford — starting next week, The Buffalo News has learned.

The project's new contractor, West Valley Environmental Services Co., has offered “voluntary separation” to employees with the ultimate target of cutting 50 workers.

The reductions are part of the contract between the new contractor and the U.S. Department of Energy, and will leave about 250 working at the sprawling site just south of Springville.

If there are not enough voluntary separations by Tuesday's deadline, then the new contractor will be impose “involuntary separations,” according to Sonja Allen, spokeswoman for West Valley Nuclear Services, the corporation that previously directed the cleanup.

Since 1981, the federal government has spent more than \$2 billion to remove spent nuclear fuel materials from a malfunctioning reprocessing plant operated there by W.R. Grace Inc.

The key corporate partners of the new operator are Jacobs Engineering Group of Pasadena, Calif., an international firm dealing with energy and engineering interests, and Washington International Group of Boise, Idaho, which acquired part of Westinghouse, onetime owner of Western New York Fuel Services.

The remaining work force will decontaminate and then raze the main processing center at West Valley.

The work force peaked at about 1,200. The plant has been a mainstay of the southern Erie County and northern Cattaraugus County economies for years.

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